

Five Hillmen Stars

Our Platteville School Community was very pleased to receive “5 Stars” (Significantly Exceeds Expectations) on our recent School District Report Card, the highest rating possible. The State of Wisconsin has undergone a process of evaluating districts and individual schools that has continually changed over the last couple of years and this had made it challenging. While this achievement certainly instills “Hillmen Pride,” the real benefit comes in the process of understanding what the designation means for us going forward.

If you have students at Neal Wilkins, Westview, or the Middle School, you will know that we have transitioned our grading process for our students. Similar to the state motivations, the goal has been to give parents and students more clear information about the skills they are being asked to develop and the concepts they are being asked to learn. It is difficult to quantify exactly what “5 Stars” means, since it looks different from school to school and district to district.

Although it sparks the competitive spirit to think of it as a contest and try and rank schools in the area, it is not an accurate comparison because the grade is determined differently for schools based on the student population. The value of the report card is to validate those things that we are doing, and to show us areas of focus as we continue to try and improve.

There are four areas that are scored and become part of the overall grade in each school.

- The first area is student achievement. This is the students’ level of knowledge and skills attained on the state academic standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. In the elementary and middle school grades, that means how well the students demonstrated their knowledge of these standards on the Wisconsin Forward Exam. For Platteville High School, it means how well they demonstrated their knowledge of the same subject areas on the ACT.
- The second area is a growth score. In other words, how quickly our students are gaining knowledge and skills from year to year in the same two subject areas. The high school does not get a growth score because the assessment that is used, the ACT, is only given in the Junior year.
- Perhaps the most difficult score to do well on is in the area of “closing gaps,” or how much the school or district is closing statewide achievement gaps between student groups such as low-income students, students with disabilities, and members of racial or ethnic groups with their peers. This is a difficult score to explain because it looks at groups of students to determine the score, but only if there are at least 20 students in each of these groups, or if they can be combined in a group to reach that number.

It compares the improvement of the group, year over year, with the improvement of the large statewide group. For example, they would look at how our students on free and reduced lunch improved over the last years, compared to how students from the large statewide population of students, not on free and reduced lunch, improved. We get a good score if our students improved at a faster pace than the statewide group...in other words we helped the state close the gap.

This is the score that makes it most problematic to try and rank a school’s overall score with surrounding districts. Although Platteville High School’s overall score ranks sixth among area schools, four of those schools do not have enough students in these groups to be scored on “closing gaps.” This would be like excusing some students from taking the hardest test, but using their average to compare to other students.

- Lastly, the district and schools receive a score for “Postsecondary Readiness.” This score is based on “how successfully students are achieving educational milestones that predict later

success.” At Westview, this means attendance and 3rd Grade English Language Arts. At Platteville Middle School, it means attendance and 8th Grade Math. At the high school, it means the graduation rate.

To sum up how well our district and schools did...WE DID AWESOME! Our schools and students should be a source of pride for our community.

Neal Wilkins did not receive a score as there is not enough data, due to the small number of grade levels that are tested on state-wide achievement measures. Westview and Platteville High School each received “4 Stars” (Exceeds Expectations) and Platteville Middle School received “5 Stars” (Significantly Exceeds Expectations). You can find full copies of the report cards on the district’s website. Our Hillmen staff, students, and families are to be commended for the work they do, every day, in our schools and in support of our schools.